Bulletin of the Government Museum, Chennai

THE MURAL ART TRADITION OF KERALA

(Tourism Endowment Fund Lecture-1)

Dr. T. Satyamurthy
Superintending Archaeologist,
Archaeological Survey of India, Chennai-9

New Series - General Section Vol.XVI No. 5

Published by
Commissioner of Agriculture & Museums,
Government of Tamilnadu
December 2003

Bulletin of the Government Museum, Chennai

THE MURAL ART TRADITION OF KERALA

(Tourism Endowment Fund Lecture-1)

Dr. T. Satyamurthy
Superintending Archaeologist,
Archaeological Survey of India, Chennai-9

New Series - General Section Vol.XVI No. 5

Published by
Commissioner of Agriculture & Museums,
Government of Tamilnadu
December 2003

Commissioner of Museums,
Government Museum,Chennai-600 008.

Price
Rs.65-00

Dr. R. KANNAN, Ph.D., I. A. S.,
Commissioner of Agriculture & Museums
Government Museum,
Egmore, Chennai-600 008.

Phone : Off : 8193778
Res : 4341209
Fax : 8193035
E - mail : govtmuse@md4.vsnl.net.in

FOREWORD

Mural paintings are a famous art form of the *Chera* country of Ancient Tamilagam (present Kerala). However, the whole of the Tamil speaking country has sites and temples where this type of paintings is found. In the north, Tirumalai near Polur in Tiruvannamalai district has cave mural paintings. Similarly, Sittannavasal caves in Pudukottai district are another famous site of murals. The Varadarajaswamy temple in Kancheepuram has murals. In the Thanjavur Big Temple, Chola period paintings were uncovered beneath a layer of Vijaynagar period paintings in the late twentieth century AD. The Pandya country has these murals in large measure. Kanyakumari district, which was under the rule of the Travancore kings and temples in Cheranmahadevi in Tirunelveli district, have exquisite mural paintings. Recently, a temple in *Tiruppudaimarudur* with murals mainly red ochre was brought to our notice for documentation and conservation.

Throughout the ages, Kerala was a centre of South Indian Art, contributing its own style to that of other centres in South India. In this beauteous, bountiful country, between sea and mountains, green due to the high density of trees and fertile land, temples are part of the landscape. The style of *Chera* (Kerala) is distinctive. This style is seen in Pandya country, which had cultural and territorial links with Kerala, like Cheranmahadevi. This town was one of the capitals of the ancestors of the Marthanda Varma dynasty of Travancore kings (1728 - 1947 AD). The style is intricate and the adornments are of great density.

Dr. T. Satyamurti, Superintending Archaeologist of Archaeological Survey of India, Chennai Circle in his earlier stint as the Director of Archaeology in Kerala has studied mural paintings in detail. He has studied the skill of the artisans as revealed through these paintings. He has analysed the style of the paintings, which is typical of Kerala. He also brings out the architectural style of Kerala as revealed through these paintings in depth in this lecture. He has also written a book on Numismatics – 'Roman gold coins from Kerala'.

We are happy to bring out Dr. T. Satyamurti's lecture as a Bulletin of the Chennai Museum. I am sure this will serve as a useful reference material to scholars as well as the students, since it based on a primary source, viz. the field work of the scholar.

RKannan

31-12-2003

Dr.R.Kannan, Ph.D., I.A.S.,
Commissioner of Agriculture & Museums,
Government of Tamil Nadu.

THE MURAL ART TRADITION OF KERALA

Introduction:

The Chera Country of Ancient Tamilagam always exhibited a distinctive but a pan Indian characteristic embellishment in its art forms. The qualitative decorative devices with suitable accompaniments exhibit the skill of the artisans of the Yore of this country. Irrespective of the medium that he has chosen to display, his aesthetic art either in stone, wood, metal or stucco, he always tried to make a balance between the religious fervor and innovation. His skill in painting during the prehistoric period is found recorded in the Maraiyur Caves, Idukki District. The palaeolithic assemblages discovered near the foothills of this cave postulate the primitive methodology, which evolved later and ramified into the art of great value.

The materials retrieved today are mostly in temples, the abode of Gods and in the palaces the abode of the kings. Known as prasadam, both the above abodes were modelled in such a way to accommodate his skill and needs in many ways in stone sculptures, woodcarvings, stucco and in metal warps. No doubt the most aesthetically sophisticated expressions among such embellishments is the mural paintings.

These are executed generally on the walls and ceilings of the temples or palaces and on the stucco and stone carvings in many instances. The development of the agamic or other ritual modes of worship gave a special boost to this penchant for painted themes, as it was falling in tune, not only symbolically with the live corporeal frame that the temple was considered to be, but also with the already established norms about the colours and complexions distinguishing the various gods, goddesses and minor divinities.

The art of painting presupposed not only the art school and the religious school(of which it was a publicity medium) but also the technical lore connected with the scientific aspects of mural execution. The painting on any surface basically involves the base, the carrier and the painting technique, besides the colour scheme, for which vegetal or mineral sources of a pre-existing type and accessibility had to be presumed. It also implies a special social-cultural élan in society for artistic self-expression with the patronage of the royalty and the guidance of the clergy.

Thus it would be appropriate to call the presence of wall paintings (or other types) in a temple as the result of a regular art-movement, with the earlier sources of inspiration having been followed up by regional artistic guilds, stimulated by the religious and political stability and stamina. Wall paintings in religious edifices had been in vogue from very early times in India and one of the earliest such vestiges are already found at the Buddhist caves of Ajanta dating to the century one or two before Christ as in the Cave Nos. 9 & 10, while the several other larger painted series as in Cave 1, 17, etc., relate to the 5-6th century A.D. in the Vakataka period of that tract. The style and stamina should have attracted wide attention and it had become fashionable to decorate temple walls by such mural themes, in the pallava, Pandya, and Chola regions, as found at Kanchi (Kailasanatha temple), Panamalai structural temple, Sittannavasal Jaina cave temple, Thanjavur (Great Temples) etc. In the Kerala region also this wave caught on and we have the earliest such vestiges on the walls of the early rock-cut temple at Tirunandikkara dedicated to Saivaite worship.This centre in Venad under the control of the Ay. Kings had immediate liaison with the Pandyan regions and whatever it received, it transmitted to the rest of the Kerala region, in to the Kuttanad, Cheranad, Malluvanad, etc. vigorously. In the later part of the imperial Chola times, when much of these tracts were subjugated by the Chola power, in the late medieval times, during the second Pandyan Empire, the fillip given to the mural art expanded enormously. However during the Perumal Kings of Kerala, we see for the first time, the stabilization of the themes and art motifs, in the wall paintings. This was, as it were, the golden age of the ritual and spiritual efflorescence in Kerala, as we find that the largest number of temples had been embellished with extensive painted mural panels on the walls of the sanctum, of the sub shrines and of the cloisters and often on those of the main gopura entrance as well. The total number of such instances might very well run into several hundreds and would in many cases, have become badly damaged due to neglect. Where, however, the temples are in daily worship and under proper control, there are chances of these murals in their walls having been periodically retouched or even repainted to suit the sentiments of the sponsors and the local people. Needless to record here that such an over-zealous and ill-informed approach to the precious murals had practically nullified, in many instances any chance for the originals to survive in the pristine condition. Any fruitful study, alike of

their technique as the colour scheme and brush work would have largely to depend upon reliable original remnants; and the retouched or over painted murals, on the other hand, would, while only supply the broad details of each of the themes. It might not be aesthetically worth examination as technical and chronological evidence. Even in regard to details, the retouching where the original themselves had been faded would and do certainly, add to the original details on the lines of the contemporary trends and devices, and might alter the very nature of the feature often. With all these limitations and difficult circumstances, it is still a notable part of the Kerala temple art, and its study would have considerable significance for unraveling the technical, aesthetic, formal, cultural and religious trends implicit in these extensive murals themselves. Above all, the fact is that these murals, for their sheer display-value on the walls of the temples and palaces perhaps constitute the most gorgeous attempt at the popularisation alike of fine arts by the temple patrons, as much as of publicity to the special cults and puranic and mythical lore. A remarkable part of some of the later among these murals is the highly informative secular themes in the form of the devotees and bystanders that are also painted in the lower registers of these panels in a somewhat caricatured and sketchy way. It provides copious details about the contemporary manners, dress, ornaments, hairstyles and idiosyncrasies. These, no doubt, had partly been influenced by the Naik painted traditions.

In the presentation made here, the historical background, technical implications are studied considering the entire Kerala assemblage as a single region even though stylistically some minor variations can be noticed as one covers the area from south to north. Wherever necessary, for comparative purpose, the reference of other areas outside Kerala is also included.

Interestingly many of these remains record the exchange of legend and themes and art tradition in between the conventional elites and the folk artists.

II. ARCHITECTURE AND ART

The cultural material of these Mural paintings available today confined reasonably to a compact period, approximately from the 15th cent. A.D. to 18th Cent. A.D. We can see homogeneity in the forms, content and in technique of these mural depictions. The earliest such painting of historical period can be traced on the walls of the Cave

temples at Tirunandikara (Dist. Kanyakumari) as datable to 9th cent.A.D. In technique and art embellishment it is nothing but another version of the painting, noticed in Kailasanatha Temple at Kanchipuram and Sittannavasal. All of them were done in lime medium technique. This being the entry point on the gateway of Venadu, it attracted the notice of Cholas during 9th-10th Cent. A.D. and the lithic record of Raja Raja-I speaks about the celebration of his birthday here. Consequently the Chola artisans brought their mural technique into the conquered territory but could execute it only in the rock cut medium. The obvious reason for not continuing the art is ascribable to the lack of outer or inner space available for such depiction. Neither the art is found to be nurtured in their own country much after its execution in Brihadisvara Temple. The probable reason may be the Cholas concentrated on the massive architectural trend in stone media.

The great art skill and technique left in the Chera country had not died but preserved it in latement manner till the architects could achieve and provide proper space for its execution in the public place like temple or palace. For the natives of Chera country, the art of paintings were in their part occasional rituals and rites as in "Kalam varidal"**(pl.I)**. It is a living tradition by which the colourful drawings of Devi or female goddess are made with rice floor and other colours and worshipped and erased on special occasions.

The silent revolution in the temple architectural pattern from the 11th cent to 14th cent. A.D. paved the way for the mural paintings to get a boost of wider space in the outer walls of the Srikoil or sanctum. In the earlier phase, the temples of Kerala were simple Ekatala vimana of Dravidian style of simple order and the space between the Kudyasthambas in the outer bhitti is rather a narrow strip to execute the painting. In the evolution process and in order to drain the heavy drain water the architects of Kerala selected an additional roof over the early Dravida vimana with an abutting platform all around the roofed it with wooden ceiling and tiled roof. The outer wall of this edifice gave them scope to leave much area for the execution of mural.**(pl.II)** The other technical requirements like the good base for holding plaster were achieved by providing a laterite wall which could hold the base lime mortar.

During this period, the Kerala architects conceived the basic idea of accommodating all type of artisans to shape their building. The inner sanctum of the

temples, a simple dravida vimana was subsequently added with another curvilinear roof. In elevation, the plinth or adhisthana of the edifice was modelled to be in granite stones, the wall or bhitti with laterite cut stones, the ceiling with wooden rafters and reapers and the roof covered with tiles of terracotta or metal. Thus the model of the sanctum was the labour of many artisans like granite carver, laterite cutter, carpenters and the metal smiths. In short, the vimana was the artists' design than the mere architects design and the mural art tradition flourished and found its full-blown maturity during 16th to 18th cent. A.D.

The distribution of the mural fashion appears to have reached its zenith around the 16th cent. A.D. largely due to the tremendous impetus found elsewhere in the main land under the Vijayanagar Empire where murals filled whole mandapas from ceiling to floor in a wide-ranging design, art motif and formal scheme. It would not be far wrong to state that the immediate momentum was imparted by the advent of the textual tradition in the temple organization, like Silpa Ratna and Tantra Samucchaya, and the efflorescence in the literature of the country abounding in delectable compositions on the Epics, like the Narayaneeyam and the various Sandeesa Kavyas. The urge to give a visual presentation of these would have appealed to the patrons and craftsmen, and the expertise for this has clearly been evident, as noted in the texts like Silpa Ratna.

The treatment of the murals also includes secular palaces, like the well known Padmanabhapuram in lower Kerala, Krishnapuram Palace near Kayamkulam and the renowned Mattancherry Palace near Fort Cochin. Their themes, techniques and method of display are not much different from the wall paintings in the temples elsewhere, although it could be stated that the last mentioned better typifies a secular residential model by the somewhat romantic and sensual appeal of several of the themes seemingly deliberately delineated that way, as for example, in the mezzanine lower chambers of the harem. All the same, there is a certain subdued decorum in the style of presentation, an artless naivete – which is indeed the hall-mark of the Kerala mural art itself, even in respect of its Puranic themes.

A celebrated example of one of the ancient churches, at Kanjur, having valuable mural relics both in original condition and in a renovated and repainted form is another example of such mural art, which was common media for transpiring any required theme.

It is interesting to know that how Christianity with its own long tradition of church and residential murals in Europe had also employed it in Kerala adapting the native techniques.

III. THE MURAL ART:

This period of the mural art in later medieval times coincided with a renaissance of literature especially in Sanskrit and manipravala, highlighting the religious lore of the Epics and Puranas. It is proper to state that the Kerala mural art virtually turns out to be a fairly insular and exclusive format, not under specific obligation to the murals in other parts of the main land, especially in respect of its idiom, and the narrative character. It clearly drew its sustenance, deeply as it were, from the vigorous inexhaustible and non-sectarian mould of the religious and ritual pattern within the Hindu population, and provided a shop window, as it were, of its catholicity and synthesis. The utter loyalty of the craftsman and the clergy to the religious and puranic specifications for the divinities, by way of complex weapons, stance and symbolism; the indefatigable spirit paved the way in portraying the popular as well as the recherches uniformly. Among the puranic and epic anecdotes; the note of tumultuous exultation with the multifarious and minutest details of the story has been picked out by the artist's brush unerringly and finished in bold outline and supple shading. The animated sensibility with which each of the figures, whether divine or demoniac, ascetic or aristocratic, goddess or goblin, had been delineated, with full contour to express a joy of life and sorrow of misery together. All these partake of the key-note of the period, and represent its prosperity, self-sustaining piety and integrity of the monarch as well as the masses, their simple but intense moments of joy and gaiety. In terms of aesthetic values, the style might be considered as stagnant, degenerate and unreal, but religious art has always to be evaluated in terms of two factors the convention and the vehicle.

There is no denying the fact that the religious conventions have been scrupulously observed in the visual narration but there is no gainsaying the fact that the vehicle of presentation had been informed by a smugness and self satisfaction-reflecting the immediate environment of the people, which was like an unruffled and placid stream. It maintained the tenor of the figure work even in its subsequent less prosperous stages, by not varying its innate stillness, lack of kinetic energy and a suffused potential energy that

charactertised it in its palmy days. The trend was also reflected in the crowded compositions, where the tendency was to fill the wall with figure work so crammed that a background is all but not existing. Generally figures are seen endlessly peeping, on their toes, over the shoulders of the rest.(**pl.III&IV**) All these figures are not a white superfluous in terms of the related puranic anecdote, but give the impression, nevertheless, of an overcrowded wall, lacking in visual clarity and functional perspective. All the same, one should not, in his over-eagerness to pass a quick criticism of this penchant of the artist, fail to note that the artist had two important factors to contend within making his final figures coherent. Having undertaken a truly multi-coloured mural, with as many as five or six hues clamouring for our ken, it was virtually an exercise in inaesthetic organization to place each of them a different hue. Where the requirements of the theme fixed the persons at specific positions and stances, it was all the more necessary for him to draw a patchy background to relieve and pick out the figure appropriately. Secondly, where the main immutable need (and indeed speciality) is to present the divinities and others in their appropriate colour (or complexion) specifications, Kerala mural artists had to choose, between the ritual native colour-scheme which differs from the prescriptions in the Silpa texts. In as much as its range of themes was such as to fulfil the expectations of the most exacting Pauranika, and colour scheme was amazingly versatile, and thus it is an enduring histriographic value, if faithfully recorded.

So much for the idiom. The narractive character of the themes had been moulded by the contemporary literature "The padinettara-kavigal – the 18 ½ poets – the Payyur Bhattattirirs, the Maharshi Acchan (who has been described as Kalidasa in poetry, a Kalpakavriksha in fights, and a Siva in might), his son Paramesvara Pattiri Mimamsa Chakravarti (the author of Sutrartha-Sangraha), and above all Uddanda Sastri of Tondaimandalam (the author of Kokila Sandesam), all these created the intellectual environment for the Malabar arts in the 15th century. There was also Kakkasseri Bhattatiri, the rival of Uddanda and the author of Vasumati-Vikramam Punam Nambudiri, the famous composer in Malayalam Ramayana Champu, Narayana Nambudiri who wrote the Subhadra-harana, Vasudeva Nambudiri who wrote commentaries to Vraddhasala-Bhanjika and Anargharaghava, Karunakara Marar, his

teacher, the author of Kavichintamani (a commentary on vrtta-ratnakara) and not the least Chenna Nambudiri who wrote the Tantra Samucchaya. The tradition well continued into the 16th-17th centuries A.D. with a similar galaxy of a scholars and saintly men like Meppattur Narayana Bhattatiri (c.1559-1665) noted for his prabandha style adopted in Mahabharata Champu and the inimitable Narayaniyam, a tune adaptation of Srimad Bhagavata in praise of Sri Krishna of Guruvayur who cured his chronic ailment. His contemporary Puntanam Nambudiri who wrote the Santanagopalam and the Gnanappana; and, finally, the 'Kilippattu' style of Tunjattu Ramanuja Eluttacchen whose Adhyatma Ramayana, the Bharatam and the Bhagavatam became household words all over Kerala.

The 17th-18th century A.D. also continued to bring forth intellectuals of the older school and caliber like Manavikrama and Manaveda of the Zamorin house, the latter having been the author of the Purva-Bharata Champu in 1643 A.D. and the Krishna Nataka in 1672 A.D. Then, Narayana Nambudiri Yogin not only completed one of Meppattur Bhattattiri's incomplete works, but also wrote the Nrisimha Champu, the Vaidhehi Sangama, the Srimasotsavachampu, the Tamovada. Commentaries on Raghuvamsa and Kumara-sambhava Rudra (author of Sisupala-Vadha Champu and a commentary on Narayaneeyam) are all the work of this period. Chidambara kavi (who, like the earlier Uddanda Sastri, hailed from Tamil Nadu), the author of Keralotpatti and Katancheri Nambudiri (of the Mamakan Kilipattu fame); lived between1698 A.D. and 1722 A.D., in the times of Rama Varma, and received the patronage also of the Namorin and the Perumpadappu chiefs. The second half of the 18th century saw the weakening of the Cochin rulers under Ramavarma, during the rise of the great Martanda Varma in Travancore (1729-58) which in that region gave a new impetus to the murals everywhere, including palaces as at the Padmanabhapuram (Upparika-maligal). All these impacts had been packed into the mural themes among which especially Rama, Krisha, Arjuna, Kiratamurti, Anantasayana, Nataraja, Durga, Nrisimha, Ganesa, Sasta on hunt, Gajendra Moksha and Sudarsana Chakra claim certain speciality persistent and purposive expression, indicating the popularity of these themes and cults for reaons beyond the literary heritage narrated above.

It is worthwhile here to mention about a dated palm leaf manuscript now preserved in the Oriential Manuscript Library, Thiruvananthapuram. This manuscript

dated to 1552 A.D. pre-runs these paintings and records rather the proto rhythemic Kathakali performance. The Chief interest of this manuscript lies in the fact that the composition pattern of the paintings, the posses of dramatis, personate, costumes and coiffures of the characters bear a strong resemblance with Kathakali or dance dramas very similar to it. Figures stand in such frames and suggest a progressive development of movement and dramatic action. The head gears, ornaments and jewellery are closely related to those are seen in sculpture and contemporary Ramanattam or Krishnanattam, the immediate precursor of Kathakali.

The only difference in the costumes of the figures in the manuscript and the other folk art dramas like Krishanattam and Kathakali is the absence of bellowing shirts in the manuscripts. Instead of this there is usual pleated sari and short cholis. The Hanuman in the manuscript closely resembles the Hanuman of Kathakali. The details of the beard and crown are resembling vattathadi characters of Kathakali.**(pl.V)** The garments resemble a fur trouser used in Krishnanattam. Most significant is the headgear resembling a typical one worn in Kathakali. The hair knots of the female characters resemble the style of Mahiniyattom or in some cases the strivesha of the Kathakali.

As far as the delineation of characters and costumes are concerned there are not much difference between the Chitra Ramanayana and mural schemes except that various colour combinations are given in the paintings. The dramatic expression of the characters in these paintings recall the elaborate scheme of Kathakali and related dance drama. The flower like ornaments over the ear known as Chevippuvu the long neck garments with a decorated knot or Kunjam all resemble the Kathakali costumes.

White, green, red, blue and black are the basic colours used in Kathakali for the make-up of the face. The same pattern of colour combination is adopted in mural paintings also. If Krishna as good character is depicted with green face in Kathakali he is also shown in green colour in the Mural paintings.**(pl.VI)** Rarely we find him in blue colour in these paintings. It is significant to note that he is generally depicted in blue colour in other contemporary paintings. In the themes, the gestures, the mudra and other technical features, these murals are exact counterparts of the Kathakali.

Musical instruments used in the dance dramas also find a place in these paintings, as seen at Mattancherry dancing Siva panel. The mizhavu played in Kudiyattam is

played by Vishnu in the Siva Pandava panel in Ettumanoor. The dramatic action in Gejendra Moksha scene at Krishnapuram palace, Rama fighting, the battle with Ravana and all other Ramanyana scenes in Mattancherry Palace are typical examples of influences of dance dramas of folk origin.**(pl.VII, VIII & IX)**

More significant is the influence of the theme-scheme in these paintings. No doubt the rise of Bhakthi movement in Kerala beginning from 12th century A.D. onwards paved a way for representation of many puranic stories in these paintings. The movement was made more popular to common man as narrated elsewhere by Malayalam literary works by the giants like Tunchattu Ezhuthachan, Narayana Bhattathiri, Punthanam Namboodiri and others. The Chakiyars also spread the puranic versions to the common man in the temples. But there are few powerful themes that are adopted in performances Kathakali, Kudiyattam, etc. The earliest popular cult worship in Kerala is attributed to Kali or Bhagavathi. But she is practically unknown in the dance drama forms of Krishnanattam, Kathakali, Kudiyattam and Mohiniyattam. Correspondingly, her theme is conspicuously absent in the mural paintings.

The other powerful pan-Indian theme is the story of Arjuna and Siva as Kiratarjuniyam. This theme has a special significance in Kerala theatre and dance. In Kathakali it achieves a new sophistication. This is popular theme in Kerala paintings also. Similarly other themes like Ramayana Story, Dhakshayajna, etc. find a place both in dance dramas and paintings.

IV TECHNICAL STUDY

Wall paintings in the Ancient India

Chemical investigations of wall paintings in ancient India enable us to divide them into four main groups. The basis is mainly on the preparation of the ground and the binding medium employed in them. In the treatment of the technique of mural paintings, four principal factors are to be considered.

(i) Carrier which supports the ground;

(ii) The ground on which the paintings are executed;

(iii) Pigments used in the designs;

(iv) The binding medium.

The locations of the wall paintings are found in rock cut temples of the Buddhist, Hindu and Jain art of the past, besides structural temples. They are located variously in the Deccan amydaloid trap or basalt, of which a large mass of the Western Deccan table-top hills are formed; in the sand-stone hills (or building materials), and in the granite hills (or building material); or in the laterite areas. These are exemplified in the sites such as at Ajanta, Bagh, Ellora, Badami, Sittannavasal, Kanchipuram, Thanjavur, Lepakshi, Tirunandikkara and Mattancherry variously.

The four groups, on technical basis, as noted above are;

I Ajanta (Maharashtra) and Bagh (Madhya Pradesh) (c. 1st Century B.C., to 6th Century A.D.).

II. Sittannavasal, and Kanchipuram, Thanjavur, Narttamalai, Lepakshi, Somepalle, Tirumalai, Cochin Tranvancore mural sites (c. 8th Century A.D. to 18th Century A.D.) South India.

III. Ellora (C. 8th Century A.D.) Madhya Pradesh

IV. Badami (C. 6th – 7th Century A.D.) (South India)

Group I

The ground here consists of two layers, the rough plaster and fine plaster. The former varies in thickness from 9.3 mm. To 54.1 mm. at Ajanta, and from 7.8 mm. to 20.9 mm. at Bagh. At the latter place, the base plaster is in two layers, the upper one being about 1 mm. thick.

The rough plaster in this group is ferrugenous earth containing proper proportion of clay, silica, vegetable fibres or paddy husks. The rough plaster does not contain any organic binding medium like gum, drying oil, albumen or casein. The consolidation of the plaster, is brought about by the plasticity of the clay, vegetable fibres and by adding paddy husks in it. At Ajanta, the binding agents are found to be consolidated than at the

latter place. The percentage of alkalis in a rough plaster is low, and hence efflorescence is negligible. The pigments used in this group are yellow and red ochres, carbon, lime, gypsum, terre verte and lapis lazuli. They have been applied in Tempera techinique with animal glue as the binding medium. Thus the popular usage calling Ajanta paintings as 'Fescos' is erroneous, as these paintings not executed in the true 'Fresco' techinique, but in the 'tempera' technique.

Group II:

In the second group, the ground has two layers, rough plaster and fine plaster. At Kailasanatha temple, Kanchipuram some of the paintings have no plaster, but have instead lime wash alone for the ground.

The rough plaster varies from 1.4 mm. to 4 mm. and 1.7 mm. to 5 mm. in some temples of Central Kerala. At Lepakshi, Somepalle, and in all the and Travanoore (or South Kerala) types, it is from 3.5. mm. to 12 mm. A good binding medium is existing between adjacent layers of rough plaster, fine plaster and film. In the Vijayanagar and Nayak paintings, Simple lime medium on plaster are employed, instead of either Fresco or Tempora technique. It consists of mixing the pigments with lime water and applying it to the dry plaster on the wall. This method stands in contrast with the Chola art where the pigments are mixed with water and applied over a wet plaster, in the true Fresco style. The Nayak stucco is very thin, varying from 2.4 mm. to 3 mm. It is comprised of three layers, bottom of rough lime plaster of 1.5 mm thick, an overlying smooth plaster of o.6 mm. and the painted film thereon. The artists appear to have taken particular care to remove all the traces of impurities except those like clay, gypsum etc., found in minute and negligible quantities. This plaster does not set well if some inert material like sand is not added to it. The Nayak plaster contains sand. The pigments employed are black especially for outlines, white, yellow, red, brown, blue, green as primary colours, and yellowish green, light blue and bluish green as mixed colours lime, lamp black, ochres lapi lazuli (in impure state for blue) and terra verte for green, have been used.

Group III

Ellora is a sole representative, as far as we know in this group. It combines the technique of Group I and II and seemingly is transitional between the two. The group consists of layer of mud applied on the wall and with one or two or three lime pasters on it. The technique of the preparation of the ground is similar to Ajanta, but the preparation of laying of the lime plaster are typical of the South Indian sites mentioned in group II. The different layers of plaster can be separated from one another, with the help of a pin or sharp scalpal. Thus, there is no adequate binding medium between them. The thicknes of the mud plaster is from 3.6 mm. to 11.3 mm. the rough plaster from 1.4 mm. to 13 mm. fine plaster from 0.3 mm. to 0.5 mm. and painted film from 0.3 mm. to 0.6 mm. Such a thick paint film betrays the lack of technical delicacy in the artist's handling of the brush (though it has no reflection of the aesthetic sensibility). This trait is shared by the paintings of the Nayak paintings at Lepakshi, Somepalle, and the Kerala (Cochin and Travancore) sites. The lime plaster of Ellora is poor quality and contains sufficient vegetable fibres, consolidating it well. The pigments used are ochres, terra verta, carbon, lime and gypsum.

Group IV

This a exemplified solely by the meager paintings at the base cave temple of the early western Chalukyas (C. 6th Century A.D.) The rough plaster here has a larger proportion of clay and fine premies of silica mixed with animal glue and vegetable fibres, The thickness varies from 0.4 mm. to 0.5 mm. Of the other components of the plaster, iron and lime occur only to the extent of 0.75% and 1.5% respectively, perhaps as impurities only. The organic matter is partly vegetable fibre and partly animal glue, both deliberately act as binding agents. The rough plaster particles are so uniformly small and the surface so smooth that a fine plaster was not perhaps concerned necessary.

Broadly, speaking the Badami technique could be considered as a modification of the Ajanta technique. The pigments present are yellow and red ocres, Carbon-lime terra verte. The pigments are applied in the Tempera technique. It is not known if the nature of the sand stone medium influenced the nature of the rough plaster and its smoothness at Badami. It is likely that some foreign influence was at work, as it is not found in any other site in India, and might well be foreign to the country. The situation calls for examination in other neighbouring sites for its nexus.

The earlier northern technique, as seen at Ajanta, and Bagh was in 'tempera' technique. The other technique which remained popular in South India for over twelve centuries i.e., from the 7th century A.D., to almost the modern times, shows the great care of the artist in the choice of the materials. The technique (of the true Fresco style) is more perfect and more enduring than that at Ajanta or Bagh. It did not find its way into north till the 16th century A.D., when it is found adopted in the palace of Akbar at Fatepur Sikri and at Jaipur. This induction in Akbar's buildings might be due to either to Mughul or Persian influence, or from the South. Before this, the southern technique was not popular in the north. The Rashtrakutas employed a poor form of it at Ellora. The northern technique was; similarly, not popular in the south, unless the Sigiriya paintings of Ceylon could be proved to be one. No scientific work so far, however, is available on it, not withstanding their being compared popularly with Ajanta in point of style. The northern technique, perhaps followed the trails of Buddhism, as it spread to centres outside India, like Bamiyan in Afghanistan, and to Kizil in Chinese Turkistan,. The non utilization of the northern tempera technique in the south is only in its technical aspects, and not in respect of its art idioms or style.

The Ellora technique seems to represent a compromise or transition between the two schools. Hence, the first coat of rough plaster is in mud, as at Ajanta, but the lime plaster is used for the subsequent layers, and to paint on. The commonness between Ajanta and Ellora is only in respect of the rough and plaster and ends there. The fact that the Pallavas of the 7th-8th century A.D. were found practicing the (southern) technique could indicate that it was not a logical lineal evolution of the northern (Ajanta) or transitional Ellora technique. The fact, especially, that it was a difficult technique would

have called for a sufficient period of experimentation. As it is found in its most perfected style only in the Imperial Chola sites in Cholamandalam, this area could very well have some thing to do with the typically brick and stucco craftsman ship that existed in Chola country from early times. Earlier sites in this tract, like Kaveripattinam might perhaps reveal painted plaster technique which will shed welcome light upon the origins of the Fresco technique in the south. The Pallava, Chola, Pandya, Vijayanagara and Nayak and Kerala paintings form the variants of the Fresco.

Paintings at Kailasanatha and Vaikuntaperumal temples at Kanchi; the paintings in these temples are some of the best examples of the mural art of Tamil Nadu. At the former place, they are executed in inner walls of the cells lining the outer walls of the courtyard. Many of them have either disappeared or faded. The paintings in the latter place are slightly later, by a few decades, in the 8th century A.D. and are found under the eaves and in the niches of the central tower of the Vimana. Most of them, except a head, have disappeared. The paintings in these two temples are older than that of the Thanjavur temple, or Vijayalaya Cholisvaram at Nartamalai.

The paintings are executed over the surface of the sandstone. The painted stucco consists of rough plaster coat of lime, with lime wash thereon, the latter being applied while the former is still wet. On the lime wash, the layer of paint film is applied. In the case of some of the paintings of Kailasanatha temple, there is a rough plaster and the paintings are executed on the lime wash directly applied to the sandstone. The thickness of the rough plaster varies with the pitted surface. The rough plaster in both these temples have been laid in the true 'fresco' technique, and they contain only sand as the inert material to help the consolidation of the plaster. In this respect and in the sandstone beds, they are similar to the Badami cave paintings although the later is in tempera technique, with animal glue as the binding medium. At Kanchi, pigments had been applied in lime and the pigments used are carbon yellow and red ochre and terre verte.

Sittannavasal:

The stucco comprises the rough coat of lime plaster with a fine lime wash thereon. The technique of painting adopted is that of Fresco or painting in lime medium on plaster. The thickness of the stucco varies according to the nature of the rock surface (which is granite here) and varies from 1.9mm to 8.9mm. The inert material used here is

sand. The pigments are lime, carbon, ochres, lapis lazuli or ultra-marine, terra verte, and a mixture of the last two. The paintings on stucco of Nayak period at Thanjavur are akin to this.. The painted surface resisted the action of water and of organic solvents as it with stood many monsoons.

Vijayalaya-Cholisvaram, Nartamalai: (c.mid 9th century A.D.)

The paintings were executed on the walls of the front hall of the temple. The presence of an organic binding medium in the paint fill was due to some drying oil. It is not clear, however, if this oil was added accidentally or deliberately to the organic material, thus imparting the additional chractertistic of the tempera technique, to simple paintings in lime medium. The lime was purposely added to the pigment and a binding medium, and the organic binding was further supplied by the presence of the drying oil. The pigments are interfused and of spread beneath the wet stucco surface. The same is the case in the true fresco.

Thanjavur:

The later, Nayak paintings here could be more or less safely dated to 1646-47 A.D. on the basis of the label inscription in the ambulatory under the portrait of Vijaya Raghunatha Nayak (1633-1673A.D.)

While the particles of pigments were found interfused in the interstices of the Chola plaster, the interstices of the Nayak plaster was free from them. This is an important difference between the pure Fresco and Fresco-Secco methods. In the Chola paintings the episodes connected with Saint Sundaramurti's journey to Kailasa on an elephant is narrated. These scenes, in technique as well as in art styles, are not the best of their kind in the earlier group of Chola paintings here. They seem to represent a degenerate Chola style, perhaps of the time of Kulottunga II whose minister Sekkilar (who wrote Periapurannam which alone gives the Sundara episode referred to above). Thus there are Two Chola layers in the murals here. The paintings on the west wall, thus, were of the 12th Century A.D. while those especially on the north are of the time of Raja Raja I

As already stated, we have some evolutionary stages of the wall painting technique in Kerala, the oldest of which is preserved, though in precious fragments, at

Tirunandikkara cave temple. This is a Fresco-Secco method, with the lime medium for the painted plaster and the mixing of lime with the pigment for binding. The ground is cut and smoothed rock over which a rough plaster containing lime and sand is prepared, of slightly varying thickness, depending upon the unevenness of the cave temple wall and ceiling, and the fine plaster carries the painting. It is nearer to Sittannavasal and Tirumalapuram cave murals, both of the early Pandyan period.

The Kerala temple murals, which might have started operating from around the 13th-14th century A.D. but seen rising to consistent patronage and copious production only from the 15th-16th century A.D. onwards. They are also a variant of the same 'Fresco' method, with ground almost always of laterite, but sometimes of well smoothed stone courses as well. A rough plaster of lime and sand of considerable thickness is laid on it as the base. In some cases, over this thick plaster, as mere white-wash is given and the painting started, while in a few others, over the plaster thus prepared, one or more thin washes of lime are given.

A treatment in some detail of the technical components of the Kerala murals is now relevant. The ground is hard whitish rock or mostly laterite.

Rough-plaster:

The thickness of the rough plaster varies widely. In some cases, as at Chemmanthitta, the white-wash applied over the rough plaster is thinner than in other places. The paint film again, is relatively thick sometimes, as at Peruvanam showing lack of delicacy in the artists' handling of the brush.

The 'ground' was prepared out of lime plaster, with lime and as well as main components. The lower chamber at Mattancherry shows pure rich lime used, and was finished by a single coat of lime. There is a low percentage of impurities. A fine gloss of the lime wash a firm adherance of the plaster in these show that special attention was paid to the preparation of lime. Precautions against the wetness of the sand, or open storage of lime also account for the excellent state of preservation of the painting. The inert materials in the plaster are mostly sand. They are sharp and angular, and are large in size in rough plaster, and minute in the lime wash, in the best tradition of the Fresco paintings of the west.

Laying the ground:

The plaster on examination, was not affected by soaking in water, and later by boiling. The lime contents hold the particles intact. The technique employed in preparing the ground was clearly one of Fresco. From the strong binding between the rough plaster and the lime wash coat received over it, it is evident that the latter was applied while the former was still wet. The surface was trowelled over, to impart a fine gloss to it.

Pigments:

Yellow, ochre, red-ochre, terre verte carbon, lime are the pigments employed. Thus only a limited number of pigments had been employed. In the Fresco process, as in these cases, pigments which are sensitive to alkalis are not found used with lime.

Binding medium:

The paint was firmly adhered to the ground. Experiments show that no drying oil, glue, albumen or casein was used with the pigments, to serve as binding medium. These also show clearly that lime and not any organic substance had been used to serve as a binding medium.

To black pigments which wets poorly, a little glue or gum must be added before grinding. This is proved here in Kerala murals also. This gum had been added to black, as a binding medium. But, lime water should have been added to impart the characteristic of Fresco technique, common with other pigments.

The pigments have not interfused into the plaster ground, or spread beneath the stucco surface. It is clear that the paintings have been done in lime medium, as also confirmed by absence of brush marks normally visible in Fresco process. Joining in plaster which is more easily visible in true fresco technique than in lime medium, is further rendered difficult in Kerala murals by the coloured background of the murals.

Thus, the Kerala murals are in the Fresco tradition, but in a variant form.

The traditional method, as described in the texts, would involve the drenching of a powder obtained by burning conch, mother of pearl or shell, in a solution of molasses and a decoction of one-fourth quantity of small peas. A quarter part sand is added along with unripe plantain boiled and beaten well into pulp. This mixture is put into wooden dug out, and kept for two months, with mixing of the solution daily. It is then ground into a

buttery plaster, mixed with molasses solution. The paste is applied to the wall and levelled even by a trowel. After it is over, the surface is rubbed with cold water and the surface white washed when it is dry.

The pigments employed in Kerala murals are yellow and red colours, green, indigo, black and white. These colours are ground fine and for long, with water from tender coconut, and a binding material made of red seeds with black eye-mark in it – ratti seeds (abrus precatorius). This binding material is also used by gold smiths. Red and yellow ochre are used in later stages. In the later stages, it is seen that they have also used gum-arabic as binding material, as these painted plasters are liable to be dislodged with a little friction on their edges. The later one, therefore, also employ the 'tempera' technique, while the older stages of the 15th-16th century A.D. are invariably nearer to Fresco style, with the special merit of being insoluble in water. The colours, however, do not seem to be capable of standing the decomposing action of lime, and hence tempera technique was the more common one. Further, as the compositions are full of detail, a true 'Fresco' technique might not be in a position to cope up with the continuity of the narrative painting, as found here. This is contrary to the contemporary Nayaka paintings where the compositions are found within a frame work and the figures drawn are limited to the space available.**(pl.X)**

The artist sketched first on the dry prepared ground in light yellow strokes. This is firmly finished in red colour. Then, the filling of the spaces takes place, and there after the forms are shaded with a fine brush by the stippling process to show the suppleness of the anatomical features. The shading of yellow is red, while that of green in black. Then, by lining all the forms in black colour, the original red line is made to disappear.

Thus, the earlier Kerala mural technique draw their influence from the Tamil Nadu examples which are nearer to the true Fresco method, alongside the Tempera method (as in some later stages) as received along the west coast from the upper western Deccan centres. If, thus, presents, a composite tradition in technique, and is a unique presentation of it in actual execution.

SILPA TEXTS AND MURALS

It is equally interesting to note that prescription of any of the Silpa texts are completely adhered to in modelling the plaster or in executing the painting. The texts

norms are very general in prescribing the techniques and the artists had chosen a combined technique as it deems fit for a temple or palace. Considering the other aspects like the structural stability plinth was invariably constructed with granite to prevent capillary action over the walls. Nevertheless, after the influence of western techniques some of the buildings like Mattancherry Palace were constructed with laterite plinth which inturn affected the paintings.

Ancient treatises like the Vishnu Dharmottara (C.7th Century A.D.) Abhilashitrartha – Chintamani (1125 A.D.) of Chalukya Somadeva III, and Silpa Ratna (16th Century A.D.) of Sri Kumara of Kerala, and Siva Tattva Ratnakara (early 18th Century A.D.), of Basavaraya deal with Mural technique on some systematic basis which are briefly summarized below:

Technique

Ancient treaties	Ground	Fine plaster	Pigments	Binding medium
Visnu Dharmottara	Rough plaster is a mixture of saffron seasame oil, gum, resin, bees-wax, liquorice clay, caustic soda, fruits of Feronia	A mixture of clay resin and sesame oil. The surface of the fine plaster is smoothened with sesame oil and milk	Gold, Silver, copper, bronze, lead, tin, orpiment, myro balan, lac, vermillion, indigo	Gum of griesela tomentosa

	Elephantium mashaka and Kasha and allowed to dry for a month to *become semi*-solid and then used as rough plaster.			
Abhilashitartha Chintamani	Rough plaster mixture of clay, animal glue, which is used in rough plaster (walls covered with three coasts of such mixture)	Mixture of oyster and glue serve as fine plaster	Red-ochre, orpiment lamp black, indigo lapis lazuli lac	Animal glue
Silpa Ratna	Rough plaster is a mixture of lime stone, shell, extracts from ficus religiosa, etc. Hot water is added to this. The extract of phaseolis Munga is added then.	A mixture of conch oyster shell or white and neem serves as fine plaster. Or slaked lime mixed with coconut water.	Yellow ochre, orpiment, red ochre, red lead, lamp black, lac dye.	Gum of neem or feronia Elephantium.

Mural Tradition:

The Mural tradition of Kerala establishes its non-sectarian treatment of the themes. It can be classified as under:

S.No.	Place	Saiva	Vaisnava	Shakta	Ramayana	Bhagavata	Maha Bharata	Other types
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
01.	Tirunandi kara	Dakshina murti	-	-	-	-	-	-
02.	Tiruvattar (Visnu Temple)	Kirata murti	Anantasayi Sudarsana Charka-Purusha	-	Rama Patta bhisheka	Yogisvara Krishna Venu gopala	-	-
03.	*Mitrananda puram* (Visnu shrine)	-	*Avataras of* Visnu	-	-	-	-	-
04.	Neyyattinkara (Krishna temple)	Kiratamurti Siva tandava	Vaikunta natha Yoga narasimha	Gayatri on Lotus/four headed Gaja laskhmi	-	Krishna (standing)	-	Sasta's hunt Dvara pala in painting
05.	Tiruvaranmula Vishnu	Parvati with maids and gods (Marriage scene)	Anantasayi	Mahakali (Shodasi in charka)	-	-	-	Ganesa Vivaha
06.	Mannancherry (Siva)	Uma-Mahesvara Kiratamurti	-	-	-	-	-	Dvara pala in painting
07.	Perunna (Subramanya)	Kumarasam bhava scenes	-	Parvati tapas	-	-	-	-
08.	Munnoothu Mangalam	Siva Tandava	Gajendra varada, Ananta sayi, Sudarsana	Durga Mahisham ardini Lakshmi Saras	Many Ramayana scenes like Dhanur bhanga,	-	Kiratar juniya scenes	Sasta on hunt Ganesa puja

			Purusha, Yoga narasimha	vati	Sita's marriage, Parasurama, Garva bhanga, etc.			
09.	Tirukkodit tanam Vishnu temple	Siva tandava Pasupada dhana	Anantasayi, Yoga narasimha Indra-Upendra	Durga Mahisha mardini, Mohini	Rama Patta-bhishekam	Venu gopala	Kiratarj uniya (in large panels)	Ganesa, Sasta on hunt, Brahma, Dvara pala in painting
10	Pundarika puram (Vishnu temple)	Siva tandava Uma mahesvara Siva, Dakshina-murti	Vaikuntanat ha Garuda Vishnu	Durga Mahisha-mardini	Rama Patta-bhishekam	Krishna leela Scenes-Venu gopala with *consorts* – Kaliya damana	-	Ganesa Sasta on hunt Brahma
11.	Kidangoor Subrahmanya	Siva-Parvati Siva	Gajendra moksha	-	-	Gopi vastra paharana	-	-
12.	Gouthampura m Vishnu temple	-	-	-	-	Venu gopala with consorts	-	-
13.	Taliyil Siva temple, Kottayam	Siva Tandava Dakshina murti Kiratamurti Siva Parvati	Vaikuntanat ha, Yoga narasimha Standing Vishnu	Lakshmi, Sarasvathi Durga, Simhavahi ni, Durga Mahisama	Yopddha Kanda series, Krishna Leela scenes	Kiratarjun iya scenes Drau-padi's Svayam vara	-	Ganesa Pooja, Dvara pala in painting

		Karttikeya Yogisvara Siva		rdini, Kali				
14.	Ettumanoor Siva	Kiratamurti	Anantasayi	-	-	-	-	-
15.	Aimanam Vasudeva puram	Siva tandava, Harihara, Kala-bairava, Kirtamurti	-	Sarasvathi (2) Amba, Durga, Anna purani	Sita lifts Siva's bow Rama Patta-bhisheka	Venu gopala, Bakasur vadha Kaliya damana	-	Asva medha Yupa Sasta on hunt Man matha as pancha bana(2)
16.	Kaipuzha Arpukara Subrah manya temple	Siva tandava Yoga Dakshina murthi, Siva Mahesa Karttikeya *Kiratamurti*	Yoga narasimha Vaikun thanatha	Amba, Durga, Mahisha mardini	Rama with Saptasala, Rama Ravana Yuddha, Sita and *Rama after* war(?) Vibhisha Pattabhi sheka Rama Patta bhisheka	Gopi vastra paharana	-	Sasta on hunt Ganesa in Shat kona Yantra Ganesa puja
17.	Vecchur Govinda puram temple (Vishnu)	Sivatandava Yoga Dakshina murti-Kiratamurti Uma Mahesvara	Standing Visnu Ananthasayi	Anna purna, Durga, Mahisha mardini	Rama Patta bhisheka	Krishna Leela scenes Govardha na dhari	-	Ganesa puja Sastha on hunt
18.	Elamkunna puzha	Siva tandava standing	-	Durga	Rama story	Krishna Leela	-	Sasta on hunt

	Subrahmanaya	Somaskanda				scenes		Ganesa Indra seated
19.	Rama Mangalam	Siva tandava (without rounded) Harihara, Tripurantaka ,Virabhadra, Sivaparvati	-	-	-	Yogisvara Krishna Krishana Leela scenes	Kiratar juniya story	-
20.	Yashur temple near Piravarn (Siva temple)	Siva tandava, Yogisvara Siva, Virabhadra, Vinadhara, Ardhanari, Harihara	Anantasayi Sundarsena Purusha Narasimha Yoga narasimha, seated Vishnu, Vishnu with Amirtaghata Visnu *Trivikrama*, Visnu with consorts, Chakra purusha	Sarasvati, Amba (seated), Bhairavi, Durga-Mahisha mardini, Durga/Simha vahini	-	Venu gopala, Krishna, Yogisvara Krishna Govinda	-	Ganesa
21.	Cherandallur Durga temple	Virabhadra	-	Durga Ashta phuja	-	-	-	-
22.	Vadakkunatha Temple (Siva)	Siva tandava Uma-Mahesvara	Narasimha, Anantasayi Vaikuntanatha Descent of visnu-Garuda Visnu	-	-	Krisha, Sudama, venu gopala Krishna	-	-
23.	Tiruvanjai	-	Anantasayi	-	Rama Patta	-	-	Ganesa

	kalam				bhishekam			
24.	Chemma nathitta Siva temple	Siva Tandava, Yoga Dakshinamurti, Sadasiva or Mahesa, Kiratamurti, Kalarimurti	Vaikuntanatha Vishnu with Sri & Bhu, Yoga narasimha	Parvati playing with ball, Durga Mahishamardini Kali, Durga Simha vahini, Amba or Lakshmi	Rama Patta bhishekam	Kaliyada mana Yamala-Arjuna, Krishna Leela scene, Venugopala with consorts	Kiratar juniya scenes	Ganesa, Sasta on hunt
25.	Yuzhakkal Muduara (Siva Vishnu)	Sadasiva or Mahesa, Tripurantaka	-	-	-	-	-	-
26.	Vadakkumuri Narayana Kulangara Krishana temple	Dakshina murti, Kalasamhara Uma Mahesvara	Gajendra Varada	-	Sita in Asokavana	Jakuta damana, Venu gopala	-	Ganesa puja
27.	Tirunaythode (Sankara Narayana temple)	Siva tandava Sankara Narayana, Dakshina murthi, seated Siva, Kirtamurti	Gajendra Varda Nrisimha, Vishnu, Astabhuja Sudarsana Purusha in Shatkona yantra	Kali Durga	Rama patta bhisheka	-	-	Ganesa sasta on hunt
28.	Peramangalam (Siva)	Siva tandava, Ardhanari, Siva Leela, Seated Siva	-	-	-	-	-	-

29.	Mundur Siva temple	Standing Siva, Dakshina murti, Siva Mahesa, Uma Mahesvara, Harihara	-	-	-	-	-	-
30.	Panjal (Siva)	Siva tandava, Siva Leela	Nrisimha avatara	-	Kodanda Rama with Sita, and Lakshmana, Rama patta bhisheka	-	Krishna with two consorts	-
31.	Yanjal,Vishnu temple	Siva tandava (without rounded) Yogisvara Siva, Kartikeya, Kiratamurti	Dasavatars, Garuda bringing Amruta, Vishnu with Sri	-	Hanuman bringing Sanjeevi	Kaliyada mana, Govar-dhanadhari Krishna restoning. Brahmana kumara	Kirtarju niya series, Partha sarathi	Ganesa. Surya nara yana, Dvara pala
32.	Cherukunnapu ram (Siva temple)	Tandava Siva Uma mahesvara	Hiranya vadha Nrisimha	Mohini	-	Venu gopala Gopivastr a harana, Krishna sudhama	Bhimsa on sara talpa	Ganesa sasta on hunt
33.	Tiruvegapura	Siva	Anatasayi	Amba	-	-	-	-
34.	Madakkunnam (Bhagavati temple) (Mudai kunnam?)	-	-	Amba and Devi panels entirely	-	-	-	-

35.	Pisharikkavu Bhagavati	-	-	Bhagavati with attendants	-	-	-	-
36.	Balusseri (Chala Bhagavati temple)	Siva Tandava Kiratamurti	Venugopala Anatasayi Vaikunta natha	-	-	-	-	-
37.	Tirucham baram Krishna temple	A few damaged ones	Many damaged ones	Durga	-	-	-	Ganesa
38.	Morazha(Siva)	Siva tandava Siva Mahesha, Dakshinamu rti, Uma Mahesvara, Kiratamurti	Seated Visnu with consorts (Jagannatha) standing Visnu	Amba Gajalaksh mi, Durga Mahisha mardini, Durga Simha vahini	Rama's boy hood, Rama Ravana war scenes, Patta bhisheka, Parasurama bhanga Rama Sita scenes	Gopi Vastra harana, Krishna with 2 consorts	-	Ganesa
39.	Triprayar	Siva Tandava, Uma mahesvara, Kalyana sundara Harihara, Mahesa Kiratamurti, Bhairava	Vaikunta natha Gajendra Varada, seated Visnu, Trivikrama, Narasimha, Varaha	Durga Mahesha mardini, Amba with child, Parvati, Anna purna Amba- Amba as Kalpataru	Asvamedha of Rama- Rama & Parasurama, Rama Ravana Yuddha, Pattabhi sheka Rama- group After coronation	Krishna patta bhisheka, Yogesvara Krishna, Venu gopala with consorts Krishna with compa nions gopivastra harana Kaliga damana	-	Ganesa, with 2 consorts Sasta's hunt Ganesa

The most interesting factor is that the mural theme nexus show a tradition of portraying a common popular themetical groups in the temples.

QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF PERFERRED MURAL THEMES

S.No.	Theme	Proportion
1.	**Siva Tandava**	**22/40**
2.	**Anatasayi**	**12/40**
3.	**Krishan themes**	**20/40**
4.	**Ramanaya themes**	**22/40**
5.	**Sastha on hunt**	**16/46**
6.	**Ganesa**	**24/40**

MURAL THEME NEXUS

S.No.	Temple type/ themes	Vaisnava	Saiva	Shakta	Ganesa	Karttikeya	Saura
1..	Visnu temple	90	40	10	8	2	2
2.	Siva temples	40	50	30	10	2	-
3.	Durga-Bhagavati	3	3	10	1	-	-
4.	Subrahmanya temples	3	12	3	3	1	-
5.	Harihara temples	5	6	2	1	-	-

(These tabulations are not exhaustive, but relate to the sites examined, and are comparative and in the nature of a random sampling)

V. DESCRIPTION OF THE MURALS:

In the following pages, some model mural panels have been considered in some detail. The sites selected are arranged in a disributional pattern although they do not stylistically and thematically form viable zonal groups. The selection of the sites has mainly a representative distributional scheme to highlight the homogenous character of the murals in adoption, technique and inter-relation of themes. The purpose is also to choose murals in various stages of development or degeneration, so that some idea of the evolution of the style, theme integrity and stamina could all be, as far as possible, gleaned.

It is hoped that the model study followed here may give a fairly compact summation of the mural art of Kerala and its specialties of treatment and cult-orientation to the general reader as well as the interested student. Its particular aim is to identify the several puranic and epic episodes and their iconography of the panels, which shed a welcome light on the flair and nuances of the clergy who had tutored the artists into the impressive execution of their task. At the same time the artists had his own choice in stylising them.

The following illustrations are, again only of the chosen among the sites described and are expected to give some useful and direct information on the lay out, draughtmanship, and space utilization modes of the artist. The simple proforma for the descriptive treatment would conduce to easy assimilation of the chief details, and form a basic sample study.

Finally, the contents of the description are to be appreciated, in the light of the initial analytical treatment of this temple art mode, cursory fingering and the almost well regimented nature of its format and contents. It reveals, as in the architecture, the prodigious art industry of Kerala craftsmen whose crowning glory has been an equally rich in wood craftsmanship.

This is only a model study which is still under desideratum and any further attempt to study all such paintings in the similar manner will add to our knowledge of Indian Art and Artisans.

I. Sri Mahadeva Temple at Ettumanur near Kottayam, Kottayam District

Architectural and locational contest

The temple is perhaps one of the largest models of the circular type with a single tala and has all the elaborate appurtenant structures, like the spacious namaskara mandapa inside the inner cloistered prakara, as outer prakara, beyond the mukha mandapa given at the end of the inner cloister, and the gopuradvara finally. It combines large scale cut stone workmanship in its basic terrace elements, with the elaborte wood-work carvings on the main outer wall of the inner temple and the ceiling of the namaskara mandapa. It has also murals on the inner and outer face of the gopuradvara. Its entire complex would appear to be contemporary and notwithstanding exuberant details of the wooden screens and ceilings would actually suggest two stages of development – the earlier stage belonging to the foundation of the temple, more relatable to the type seen at Thirukodithanam excepting that of the conical roof is in single tala

Iconographic and technical details:**(pl.XI)**

There are two large size murals on either side of the gopuradvra in the innerface-one to the north representing Anantasayi, and the other to the south showing Siva tandava. Both are common and familiar themselves in Kerala murals and alongside the Siva-tandava in the same panel is also shown Siva in the form of Kiratamurti combining terrifying as well as benedictory features. The Anathasayi associated with the scene, with Sri Devi and Bhudevi being showing in larger dimensions at the head and foot respectively, while the other figures include Siva at the head end, Garuda at the opposite end, Indra, Aswins, Dikpalas, Brahma, Tumburu, Narada and the Panchayudhas personified. It is important to note that when compared to the Mattancherry specimens, we do not have Sukha Brahman also shown in the assemblage. On the other hand, the type is in conformity with the Kerala form where a linga is shown immediately below the prasarita hasta of the right hand of Vishnu and is shown in the fact of worshipping the linga. The stylistic features of both Anantasayi as well as Tandava Siva where all the divinities and the Parivara of Siva, Rishis, Sanakadi yogis, etc., are shown around the

central circular Tandava, are itself to transition when the mural scheme went out of vogue on the main wall that was replaced by wood work. There are two more mural panels, smaller in size in outer space in addition to the dvrapalas. But these would some what have been recopied and retouched at later time and more degenerate then those shown at the inner face of the gopuradvara.

Stylistic stage:

These murals are contemporary with the innermost temple in the present form and give us the complex of a large scale temple of the late mediaeval times around the 17th-18th centuries A.D. for central Kerala.

2. Mattancherry Palace, Cochin, Eranakulam District: (pl.XV)

Architectural and locational contest

This is not only the display of the most compact and functional utilization of murals in a residential palace but is also amenable to the separation of the main phases of the development of the mural art in Kerala of the late medieval times. This palace was used by the Cochin Royal family and was a self-contained unit with the tutelary deities temple below at ground floor level (pazhayannaur Bhagavati, apart from Sri Krishna temple just adjacent, outside the palaces. It has the State room or the Coronation hall the main rest room of the King (Ramayana room) and the rooms in the mezzanine floor for the ladies, all but the first containing the murals.

Raw material of the walls:

The walls are built of laterites; plastered over for the execution of the murals.

Iconographic and technical details:

The upwards of 16 different themes in five rooms, include 40 to 45 Ramayana panels, summarily presenting the story of the epic. Starting with Dasaratha performing the yaga and the birth of the Princes, Rama's departure to the forest, Bharata beseeching Rama's return, Rama in Dandaka, Rama and Sugriva, Hanuman vanquishing Surasa, Rama-Ravana fight, fight between Rama and Kumbakarna, ordel of Sita Rama's return

ad reception in Ayodhya. The themes of Mahalakshmi and Bhumata, Kiratamurti, Siva-Parvati, Ardhanari, Anantasayi, Guruvayarappan, Vaikunthanatha (Tiruppunithuram Appan), Siva's marriage as seen in Kumarasambava, lifting of Govardhana, Krishna receling amidst Gopis, Parvati on bull surprising Siva with Visnu as Mohini playing ball, as Siva comes riding on a bull. The last mentioned example in the harem room of the lower floor are surcharged with a certain degree of remantic strain and vicarious eroticism in the animal studies. Seemingly, this was to give the appropriate key not sentiment of these rooms.

The murals in front of the two lower rooms have only the unfinished painting with only outlines sketched with a bold yet flowing strokes that bring out the unity of the entire length of the wall covered by the theme namely, the marriage of Uma and Siva.

Stylistic stage:

The Ramayana room is taken as the main phase showing the progress of mural art as patronised and subsidised by the royal house and the painting in the room, just at the head of the staircase leading to the lower, as also the one adjacent to it with Tiruppunithura Appan panel are to be taken as the next stage of evolution while the unfinished and finished panels in the harem rooms should be taken as the devolutionary stage of the court art tending towards stylistic rigidity and aesthetic regression.(pl.XV)

3. Vadakkunatha (Thenkailasanatha) temple, Trichur:

Architectural and locational contest

The murals depicted in the various parts of this temple complex could be divided into three groups. Those which are found on the main Thenkailasanatha Temple ad the present Vadakkunatha temple in worship; Those which are found on the two adjacent side walls of the Nadi cloister near the entrance and those which are found on the cloisters surrounding the two main buildings.

Raw material of the walls:

Laterite and plater.

Iconographic and technical details:

Of these the second group comprises the usual formual of Anatsayi and Siva tandava which is found in several temples as the entrance and are of a reasonably large

area in each case involving scope for multiplicity of details consistent with the dimensions of the temple itself. Cloister of the main temple is concerned, comprises eight panels of which in seven units depicting the themes variously of Sri Rama Pattabhisheka, Narasimhavatara, Krishna Sudama, Uma-Mahesvara, two smaller sub-panels badly obliterated, but probably for two individual figures like celestial members, a divinity with consort seated on the same asana in sukhasana pose, with the consort on the lap the divinity rendered in white complexion but holding in between the right hands a stem like object which cannot be properly identified. It is seated inside, a pavilion surrounded by two groups on either side, the proper right side group comprising four main figures, three below and the fourth above, while the proper left side group comprising four main figures, three below and the fourth above, while the proper left side group comprising only one figure with hands held behind the head and accompanied by what appears to be a horse or a bull preferably the latter. Both these groups are shown as resting above the clouds. The likelihood of its being a saivite scene cannot be ruled out. The pavilion is with great detail pillars forming almost the three replicas of the models like those of the namaskara mandapa; Venugana Krishna surrounded by Gopi and heads of cattle; and lastly on the adjacent wall at right angles to the main series is the panel of Vaikunthanatha or the Parampada or visnu in heavens accompanied by the consorts, Garuda, Tumburu, Narada and other figures. A feature of the consorts is the representation of children one each in their lap in addition to one more represented by the side of Bhudevi. Visnu is seated under the sevenhooded Seshanaga. The ayudha-purushas of Visnu, five in number, are also behind him. Another interesting feature is the representation of a standing figure, dark complexioned with crossed hands, right hand holding the flute and the left arm under the chin. If it is to represent Krishnadevarata and in that case the depiction of small children is part of the Maya, before Krishna was actually to be born as the eighth is also likely to be indicated in the group.

The entire group broadly falls into the three categories by way of technique and colour scheme. The first four forming one group, the next two forming another and the last forming a third. It may be stated that of these, the first and the last group are relatively earlier than the middle group, and it is very likely that the first group is the earliest of the lot. The Venugana Krishna panel appears to have a good bit of its right

hand side section middle and upper covered over with heavy whitewash which can be very carefully and easily removed to expose the full details within.

The western cloister represents two panels only partially preserved in the case of one another and overlapped by the larger panel. The smaller one shows Tandava-Siva in which a good part of the medallion has been obliterated. The larger panel depicts the descender Visnu for avatara into the earth as witnessed by the Trinity, sages, divinities, etc. A large part of the scene is also representing the natural environment of animals, flora, birds, etc. The brush work and the modeling of the anatomy very clearly suggests its later date.

The characterisation of the descending Garudarudha Visnu however has much to command itself by the vigorous disposition of the same especially the well extended top right arm carrying the chakra. The smaller panel, however, only has been outlined but not filled.

Stylistic stage:

Of the three temples in the inner complex the Sankaranarayana temple which is in the middle and has been provided with perspex sheet windows around carries the earliest series of murals. Its walls are of laterite and plaster are fully covered with mural scenes and directly comparable to the stages found at Mattancherry basically to the middle stage and perhaps in some of their sections to the third. The other two temples though also containing extensive murals are not only comparatively recent but also badly retouched from time to time and have only their value for comparison.

4. Siva Temple at Chemmanthitta, Trichur District.

Architectural and locational contest

The temple itself provides for basic stone work in its composition of pilasters, etc. including the dvarapalas while only the window niches, the wall and the valabi are rendered in laterite. The painted murals on the walls are generally confined to the spaces between the pilasters or the window niches and wherever the subject ends a regular boundary demarcation is given in beaded design.

Raw material of the walls:

Laterite and plaster.

Iconographic and technical details:(pl.XII, XIII & XIV)

The colour schemes show a certain versatility involving several pigments, namely dirty green, blue orange, red and of course white and therefore would belong to the classic stage. Even the facial modeling does not show over much elongation and the filling has all the best characteristic of light and shade found in the early stage of the murals in Cochin area. Even devices depicted for jata, bead and all that represent a naturalism which again reinforce the above view. That drapery again wherever shown is minimum and lines of the drapery are not very much prominent. The figure work in group composition again has a basic clarity by individual figures are well superior from others, clear-cut propriety and without an oppressive and colourful background ornamentation.

Starting clockwise the first panel represents Rama's coranation,two stages apparently Vasista and Vamadeva are pouring sacred water over his head, Rama seated for the vrata with folded legs with palmset across the lap. The muscles in the abdomen are bolder as found in a sitting posture. The remaining members of the group, namely the brothers as well as the monkey chiefs are taken to one side of the panel since a pilaster is intervening at the side. They include in the main six figures in the upper part and two more in the lower, of which one figure in blue, seemingly Bharata, is well preserved now. It would seen that certain degree of retouching had been attempted in comparatively later stages for the beards, on the eyebrow, neck-line etc., which do not however spoil the total effort too much. The next panel is between the first pilaster and the window niche and is the Siva-tandava rounded with Siva shown in lalita pose, but with one slight difference that the apasmara below is having his head towards proper left and leg towards right. Even the hand pose of the left main hand of Siva is in one of the variants of this pose. There is only one figure on the right top corner is that of Kali with Naga and Simhakundala with a sula carrying the impaled body. The rest of the attendant figures namely, Parvati and the drummer Nandi figure in the lower part are again shown in a not too crowned disposition. The third panel between the window niche and the pilaster is

that of seated Vishnu of the Vaikuntha type under seven hooded Ananta accompanied by Bhudevi also seated to his left. The two different shades of colour between Vishnu and Bhu indicate a mastery in colour harmony. Visnu is seated in ardha-paryankasana while Bhu is kneeling over the coils and resting against the left arm of the God. The peculiar bend of the body and tilt of the face of the God are again noteworthy. The next figure between the pilaster and the false door on the cardinal point is a princess shown in golden complexion playing with a ball. This theme is often attempted under several context associated with Rama as well as Siva contexts. In this particular case, the complexion of the princess and her juxtaposition with the seated Siva on the other side of the niche will indicate that this is the figure of Parvati. A certain amount of vegetal motif in the form of creepers and festoons of special mention for their clarity of outline. The corresponding figure of Siva seated in Yogi pose with right leg horizontally flexed and left leg vertically flexed and left arm raised over the knee and right arm in a posture of exposition and is being seated under a banion tree whole branches are beautifully shown and are resided by pockets, parrots, etc. would suggest the figure has Dakshinamurti. The figure is seated on a tiger skin. There are three attendants below in the lower register in place of the usual four. The false door in between in its narrow door sections represents Kaliyadamana Krishna on one side and Krishna breaking Yamala and Arjuna trees in the other part. The next between the pilaster and the window niche is that of Ganesa puja. Ganesa it should be noted is formally facing unlike the relativity developed stages where a side profile is more common. Secular devotees are shown in the lower register. The adjoining panel to the next pilaster is Sasta on hunt. It is interesting to note that the pale coloured horse upon which the dark coloured Sastha is riding has a floating character which is further heightened by the dense foliage demarcated by a beaded line in the lower part. All the accompanying figures are taken to the upper part, three on one side and the one on the other side. The excellent posture and gracious depiction of Sastha holding the reins by the left had and holding an arrow down-turned in the raised right hand are again indicative of the remarkable craftsmanship of the period on murals. The next panel shows sanding Visnu accompanied by Sri and Bhu. Unfortunately, the lower part of Visnu's body is completely gone where in the lower left had probably holding gada had disappeared. Celestial figures on the top zone each within his own numbus are depicted

in a horizontal row, but eyes centering upon the central figure on either side. There appears to be five such figures. The extreme right corner adjacent to the next theme and distinguishable only by the direction of the look of the figures. Next theme is that of Sadasiva seated with three heads in the lower row and one head just above the fifth head being on the rear side. He holds a sula on the right hand and a vessel in the left hand. The attendant figures containing Rishis, Indra and others are shown in the upper row while six attendants are shown three on either side. The figure is shown as wearing a channavira or cross belt and a mundamala and is clad in tiger skin. The next between the pilaster and the false door (western side) is yoganarasimha shown under the canopy of a palace structure with cables and conical roofs. The figure has been badly affected and had bleached. The corresponding figure on the other side of the window is Kiratamurti, whose lower part is totally gone. It appears to have been subjected to heavy retouching. The next panel is apparently that of Durga Mahishamardini although the lower part is gone. The sula of Durga, however, is planted vertically downwards. Among the attendant groups of figures on the top like Visnu, Indra, etc. One interesting theme is that of Markandeya hugging a Sivalinga indicative of the Kalarimurti episode. A figure of Kali is also depicted on the extreme right top of this group. The next panel is an allied theme of Durga as Simhavahini. It shows Durga catching hold of by one other left hands the tuft of what appears to be the Asura holding a sword in his right hand. She is eight handed holding several weapons including sanka and chakra. The lion figure upon which she is mounted appears to be somewhat stylized and rather disproportionate to the size of the Durga. The next panel however, fully utilized the total space between the pilaster and pilaster excluding the window niche in between for the Kirate story depicted in three sections. One to the north showing the fight, the one nearer showing the earlier stages of penance of Arjuna and the subsequent acceptance of Pasupatastra. The figure of the theme by their comparative brief narrative sequence show the desire to emphasis the main scene and not crowd the panel with too many details. The theme is continued in respect of the fight. However, even into the adjoining northern panel close to the false door and these four main stages of the fight appear to have been the models for the wood work bracket that became very popular depicting this theme on the outer supports of the door roof. The false door shows certain scenes from Krishna Lila like stealing butter, etc.

The next panel shows in two registers Siva and Parvati, the latter offering salutations and flowers to the former in two postures and the former holding a bow and arrow, in his hands. It might even be that the theme basically is related to Kirata story mentioned earlier Siva himself is depicted here like a Kirata, a forest scene is shown as background. The next panel shows a seated figure under a canopy with water being poured on the head by two persons. The figure itself appears to be seated on a lotus and should perhaps have its analogue with the seated figure of Amba which is shown elsewhere as holding a child in the bosom and is based by the attendants. The main figure is completely missing. The other panel adjoining show Venugopala with Rukmani and Satyabhama on either side with legs placed in padasvamtika pose. The next one is the sanding figure of Siva and Parvati under an elaborate stylized foliage shown radiating above their heads and blessing a figure standing in front which has been completely disappeared. The form should be taken as the form of Chandrasekhara. The last figure is a standing female figure with golden complexion, two handed, holding an indeterminable object in the right hand looking like a club while the left hand is in a type of varada pose. There are two to three attendant figures in the upper register and one interesting small figure standing above close to tree to which he appears to have been tied. His hands are folded. The figure looking at the female figure below appears to have a relationship with the panel, which is, however, not clear at present.

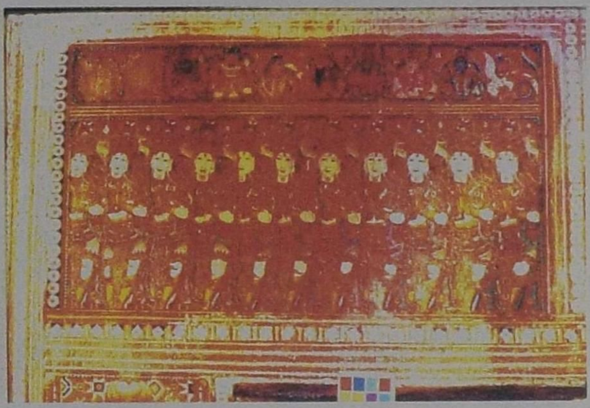
Stylistic stage:

It would, be appropriate to consider this as almost closely following the very first stage of Kerala murals and placeable within the 16th century itself.

Kalam Vaiathal

Temple Model

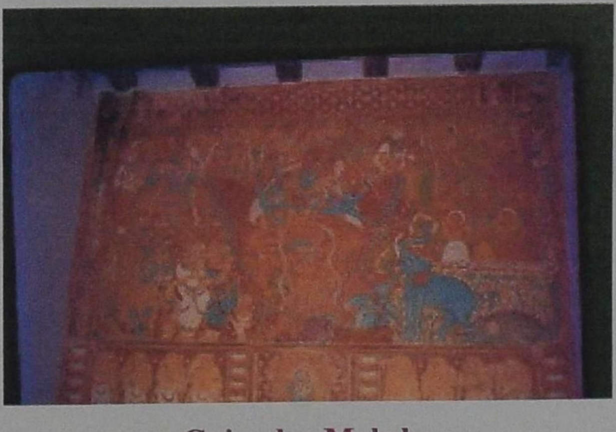
Crowded Compositions



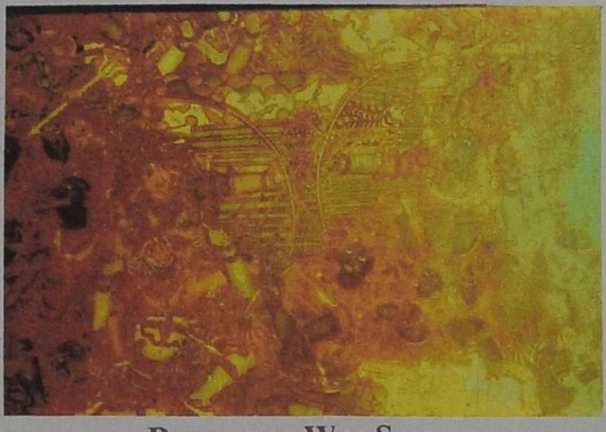
Chitra Ramayana

Chitra Ramayana

Govardhana Giridari

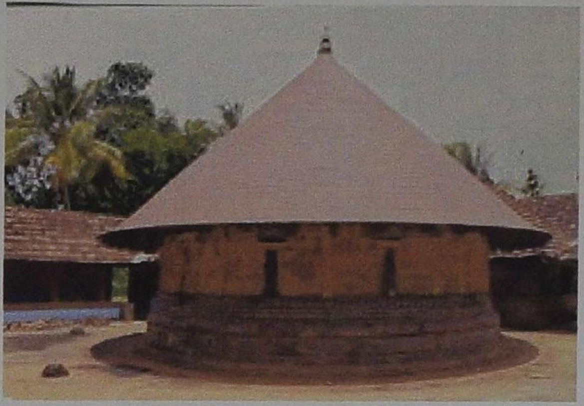


Gajendra Moksha

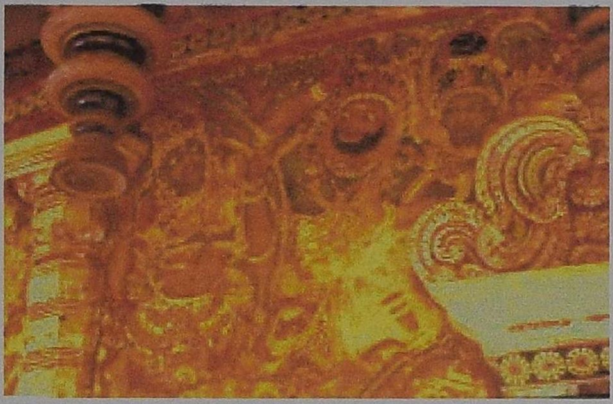


Ramayana War Scene

Vishnu playing Muzhavu, Ettumanur



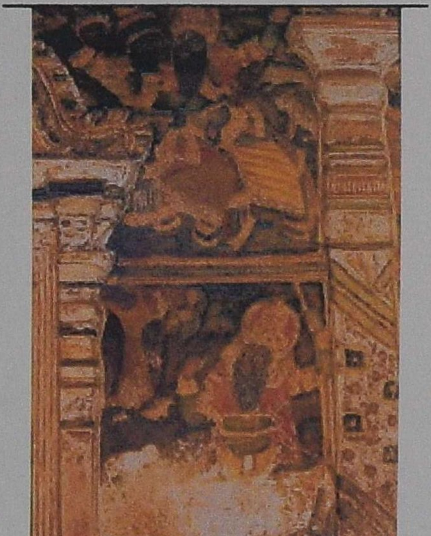
Siva temple, Peruvanam



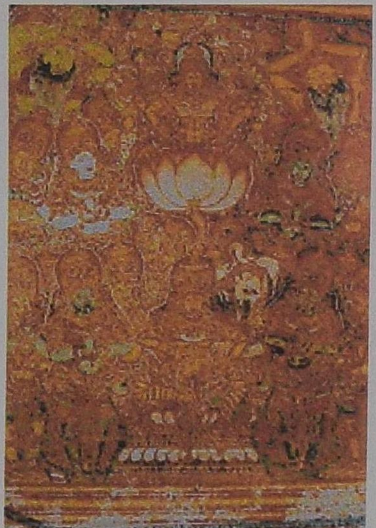
Kirata Arjuniyam, Chemmanthitta

Bishma Saratalpam, Chemmanthitta

Nayaka Period Painting, Chidambaram



Kirata Arjuniyam, Chemmanthitta



Indira worshipping Lakshmi, Mattancherry